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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LIBREVILLE 000547

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR A/C FOR LISA KORTE

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TAGS: [KHUM](#) [KTIP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GB](#)

SUBJECT: GABON: PRESIDENT BONGO TO STRENGTHEN COOPERATION
WITH THE U.S.; MAINTAIN ROLE IN REGIONAL CONFLICT
RESOLUTION

REF: A. A: 09 LIBREVILLE 00539

[1B.](#) B: 09 LIBREVILLE 00486

Classified By: Ambassador Eunice Reddick for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (c) Summary: In a December 4 meeting with the Ambassador, Gabon's President Ali Bongo Ondimba said he would like to strengthen the good bilateral cooperation that already exists with the U.S., and pledged to stay involved in facilitating solutions to regional conflict. President Bongo commented on the likely vote for independence of southern Sudan and instability of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as issues of concern for regional peace and security. He would like to see more U.S. investment in Gabon, and has made reducing illegal activity along Gabon's coast, including trafficking in persons, a priority. He expressed appreciation for briefings that have already been offered by Washington to assist Gabon assume its seat on the United Nations Security Council in January. End Summary.

¶2. (c) Per Ref A regarding climate change talks in Copenhagen, the Ambassador met with President Ali Bongo Ondimba on December 4 to discuss bilateral, regional and other issues. President Bongo conducted the meeting in French and fluent English with two aides from his office present.

Bongo Would Like More Bilateral Cooperation and U.S.
Investment

¶3. (c) President Bongo said he was pleased with the close bilateral cooperation with the U.S., particularly between our militaries. He hoped that training, joint exercises, and exchanges would continue under his successor as Minister of Defense, Angelique Ngoma. The Ambassador noted some of the mil-mil activities already scheduled for 2010, including ship visits under Africa Partnership Station (APS), represent positive opportunities for cooperation.

4.(c) The President would like to see more interest from U.S. business in Gabon as he implements his development program for "Emerging Gabon" He highlighted opportunities for investment in Gabon's tourism, mining, and wood sectors. The Ambassador pointed out the importance of completing a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT), and streamlining the process of setting up a business in Gabon. She presented the President with a copy of a proposal for a strategic study of Gabon's rehabilitation and expansion project for petroleum storage facilities that could qualify for a U.S. Trade and Development Agency (TDA) grant. The proposal illustrated how U.S. expertise in the petroleum sector could meet Gabon's interest in economic growth. She also noted that U.S.

Forestry Service experts, with funding from the Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE), would be returning to Gabon to assist with the development of concessions in the national parks. Continued cooperation through CARPE would improve Gabon's capacity to manage its national parks and attract private investors in tourism.

Recent Successes in Returning Trafficked Children, But More Needs to be Done

¶ 15. (c) The Ambassador raised U.S. concerns about trafficking-in-persons, particularly the trafficking of children from West Africa and neighboring countries into Gabon. She commended Gabonese authorities for their interagency coordination and cooperation with UNICEF and the governments of Benin, Mali and Togo to safely return 25 trafficked children found on board a vessel interdicted along Gabon's coast in November (ref B). The President said he was aware of the case, and that instructions were given to relevant Gabonese authorities to manage it appropriately. He emphasized that Gabon was a recipient country, and more needed to be done to stop illegal migration from Gabon's neighbors. Gabon was doing its part to improve surveillance of its coast for illegal activity, and to address the trafficking problem bilaterally with neighboring governments and in regional meetings. The Ambassador said the U.S. would continue to help Gabon combat trafficking by providing training to law enforcement and justice authorities, and to Gabon's navy to improve coastal surveillance.

LIBREVILLE 00000547 002 OF 002

Challenges Ahead for Gabon in UNSC; Thanks for Help from Washington

¶ 16. (c) The Ambassador congratulated the President on Gabon's election to one of the non-permanent member seats on the U.N. Security Council. He replied that there was difficult work ahead in the UNSC, including Iran and nuclear issues, and appreciated the cooperation that had already been offered from Washington to Gabon's U.N. Mission in New York. He said he might visit New York in March when Gabon chairs the Council.

Terrorism, Piracy, Sudan, DRC

¶ 17. (c) The President commented on several international security and regional issues. In response to President Obama's remarks on Afghanistan, Bongo said that Al Qaida had to be stopped in Afghanistan or it would expand even further into Africa where it had already taken root in Somalia and East Africa. He expressed concern about the Gulf of Guinea becoming a target for AQ because of its resources and location as a major trade route. He also remarked that piracy in the Gulf of Guinea could spread and intensify just as it has done off the coast of Somalia.

¶ 18. (c) The Ambassador asked President Bongo about the regional issues that were of particular concern to him. He said the future of Sudan was at stake with the upcoming vote regarding independence of southern Sudan. Bongo believes that the result in favor of independence is already predictable, but will not be acceptable to Khartoum. The Arab League has also rejected the partition of Sudan as an acceptable outcome. Bongo added that President Deby is talking to the southern Sudanese to find a way to defuse further conflict with Khartoum that could spill over into Chad. The best solution, Bongo offered, would be for President Bachir to step down, but that won't happen.

Moreover, the southern Sudanese lack a strong leader in Salva Kiir. President Bongo said he would stay engaged with other regional leaders to help facilitate a solution before conflict engulfs the region.

¶9. (c) The President is also concerned about the stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo if rebel leader Jean-Pierre Bemba were to be released from prison. Bongo said he communicates frequently with President Kabila on matters concerning the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC) and the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC). He mentioned that the CEMAC heads of state will likely meet in Bangui on December 14, providing an opportunity for the leaders to discuss regional problems (NOTE: Embassy contacts have since told us the meeting is postponed until January. END NOTE.).

COMMENT

¶10. (c) President Bongo was preparing his working visit to Italy that began later that week when he met with the Ambassador, but he was already thinking ahead to meetings in Bangui and Copenhagen. He maintained a full travel schedule since his investiture in mid-October meeting with counterparts in neighboring countries and Europe. Bongo made it clear he intends to stay engaged personally on regional issues, and ensure Gabon fulfills its responsibilities on global and multilateral matters. Further consultation with USUN and Washington will help Gabonese make informed decisions in UNSC and regional forums. End Comment.

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